11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

games with sticks and cloth, or wooden, balls. The adult males may do odd jobs around home, such as loading and moving bags of grain, or repairing farm equipment. But they are likely to gather at some convenient spot, perhaps at a boundary between fields, and discuss land disputes, arrange marriages, reconcile quarrels, or tell stories.

The daily activity of the Amhara peasant is somber and severe. It is guided by the constant awareness that one must provide for oneself everything he needs in this world. His is a life of deadening exertion, devoid of casual gaiety. Even in his diversions the mood is generally serious and tense.

One of the Amhara peasant's principal diversions is litigation. On days when heavy labor is forbidden the judge's yard is filled; nor is it ever empty on work days. Some peasants spend as much as twenty to twenty-five per cent of their waking days at court. (Because of its importance in Amhara culture, litigation will be discussed at greater length in later chapters.)

Going to market is another diversion. The trip is made by the peasant or his wife, or both, according to the needs of the household. The wife usually is responsible for transactions dealing with cooking equipment and spices, the husband for animals and farm equipment, while either is competent to negotiate about the great common denominator of Amhara life—grain. Exchanges are made either by barter or currency, which in olden times consisted of salt bars, pepper, and iron, as well as silver.

The market provides an occasion for seeing distant relatives and friends, catching up on the latest news of the area, and generally countering the normal isolation of the peasant's life. It is especially stimulating for children, who may be treated to a piece of sugar cane if they are lucky. But the marketgoers are less absorbed with being sociable than they are with the serious business of locating the items they lack, haggling over the terms of exchange, and getting on the trail in time to arrive home before dark.

Finally, the peasant's day may be devoted to one of the many celebrations that constitute the brightest moments in his life. Huge feasts are held on the occasion of weddings, christenings, and memorial anniversaries. Feasts and special festive activities mark the various religious holidays. Indeed, apart from the alternation of the rainy season (June-September) and the long dry season, and the related alternation of planting and harvesting the different crops, it is the cycle of holidays and weddings that defines the pattern of the Abyssinian year. Yet even these holidays have a fundamentally serious tone. Apart from the feasting, they are chiefly times for the veneration of sacred symbols and the real or symbolic letting out of aggression.

The Yearly Cycle

The new year falls on St. John's Day in September. For this occasion the floor of the peasant's home is strewn with freshly cut grass, tall and green after

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rection against ganels (but as a category of agents, rather than as named individuals), against the shifta bandit, and against the wild animals of the lowlands. The prophylactic abinet that he acquires, although short on asmat, perhaps lacking telsem, and with few magical features of manufacture, he works into kitabs. While the student's initial stimulus for collecting these abinet is his own immediate needs, he is nonetheless aware of the commercial value of such abinet, in the form of commercial services for lowland peasants.

Relatively few experienced debteras pay visits to the kola lands. The lowlands, considered unhealthful and dangerous by highlanders in general, are still less appealing to the mature debtera. He deprecates them for the absence of ecclesiastical establishments, and fears them for what he believes to be the shifta's predilection for robbing and murdering debteras.[27] In lieu of more expert services, and attracted by the moderate costs, the lowlander is often anxious to purchase kitabs from visiting students. The students, in anticipation, prepare a score or more of kitabs before traveling to the lowlands;

[27] Debteras attribute the shifta's murderousness to his fear of subsequent magical revenge by the debtera.

a blank space is left on each kitab, to be filled in later with the client's name. In general, the student initially sells kitabs to the lowlands to assist him in gathering agricultural products. The kitabs are purchased with either crops or services, and only infrequently with money. The peasant's services include recommending the student's kitabs to his neighbors, safe storage of the goods which the student has collected, and lending draught animals to bring the student's sacks up to the highlands. Sometimes, enterprising students arrange their visits in order to obtain payment in cotton, a relatively valuable product which debtera students are unable to obtain otherwise.

The student's experience selling kitabs in the lowlands has a significant effect on the course of his subsequent abinet career. First, his abinet interests are redirected. His previous acquisitions were abinet which served an immediate personal interest, and whose commercial value was adventitious. These commercial successes, however small-scale, frequently stimulate the student to obtain abinet which have an exclusively commercial value. Interest in personally useful abinet by no means ends during this period, however; often it is accelerated by the student's changing attitudes to the practice of abinet. There is a tendency to now perceive his moral interests as less opposed to these works than he had pre-

12:Young E-4,5 (1966) 1971 MP5 Amhara MP5
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viously conjectured. Concomitantly, he renders these works morally acceptable by emphasizing their inoffensive goals and the divine and untainted sources of their abinet powers. Thus, he seeks more specialized academic abinet, from among those studies which enable him to learn quickly, or retain what he has learned, or extemporize well, or master any one of the ecclesiastical subjects of the debtera's curriculum.

Second, the student's commercial success often convinces him to give up entirely his earlier economic activities. In part, he is persuaded by the economic rewards of writing kitabs, since the profits can equal those obtained from selling kibe, while requiring neither the great capital outlay nor capital risk which characterizes kibe trading. Equally significant is the young man's pride in his publicly acknowledged abinet powers. He begins now to consciously assume a new identity as a self-sufficient manipulator of human and supernatural forces, a self-image which contrasts so obviously with the mendicant and passive character of his earlier years.

Third, he is able to accelerate the accumulation of a modest reserve of money. With this, he can purchase relatively specialized abinet, generally from fellow students who already own important studies. Before this time, the student could obtain relatively valuable abinet only from a knowledgeable debtera who was prepared to act

12:Young E-4,5 (1966) 1971 MP5 Amhara MP5
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*787 539 75 tious occupations, journeys and marriages (thus paralling information also given in the kokob text).

Appendix D provides illustrations of medically relevant information which can be obtained from awdunigist texts.

*787 *278 *755 *793 539 In the main, a debtera acquires awdunigist texts individually, just as he collects digams, kitab recipes, and herbalist therapies.[30] Awdunigist repertoires therefore vary in comprehensiveness from debtera to debtera.

*787 539 178 •437 Moreover, "definitive" versions of awdunigist texts are unknown; whatever their common origins may have been, extant texts are probably unique products of many adventitious deletions and additions. Deletions are most likely when texts are transmitted from seller to buyer. At that time, details are sometimes withheld by the seller, in order to secure additional payments, or as a bond

[30] Over the last three decades, the accessibility of awdunigist texts has been affected by the publication, in Asmara, of a collection of these texts. Most are in Amharic, but perhaps a quarter are in Ge'ez entirely or in part. Although many debteras demean these texts, they are in fact used, particularly by "weak" debteras. Public illiteracy, ignorance of the book's existence, of where it can be obtained, of the precise manipulations it requires, together with the limited utility its contents hold for the layman, and the fear of putative satanic associations have prevented its diffusion to the debtera's public, however.

12:Young E-4,5 (1966) 1971 MP5 Amhara MP5
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against continued services from the buyer. This practice occurs, in fact, in the transmission of all categories of debtera works. For example, while relating therapeutic information, the seller may indicate that he has omitted an ingredient, or he may identify it with an ambiguous or obscure nomer. Should the would-be purchaser subsequently fail to satisfy the owner, the incomplete therapeutic notation must be deleted from the text. On the other hand, debteras frequently add information to texts, first inserting it as marginalia and then, once its efficacy has been accepted, including it within the text when recopying or transmitting it.

12:Young E-4,5 (1966) 1971 MP5 Amhara MP5
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more completely, is to violate the conventions of the gwadeña relationship, and to close it off to ego altogether. Moreover, the intense gwadeña relationship, which binds pairs of kiyne students is typically brittle, and is infrequent in later years when commercially valuable abinet are being acquired. Finally the gwadeña relationship is antithetical to the independent and aloof (kuruw) character associated with the man who owns strong abinet.

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The exchange of labor for abinet is difficult to arrange. An abinet owner must be found who is disposed to such exchanges, and has not already obtained someone to fulfill his needs. For the recipient, the exchange means often demeaning work over an extended period of time, with a humiliating lack of an effective quid pro quo, in order to acquire a single abinet study.

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Debteras are not reluctant to price their abinet studies, in Ethiopian dollars, for prospective purchasers. Since a man's standing as a practitioner of abinet is intimately related to the effectiveness of his individual studies, the evaluation of his abinet against a nearly universal standard of value (Ethiopian dollars) is likely to be understood as an implicit personal challenge. Thus, the owner's evaluation of his abinet is inevitably greater than any amount likely to be paid. Prices range from E$50. to E$500., immense sums relative

*756 *787 *793 435 • 437 to the modest cash reserves of the potential purchaser whose money reserves are unlikely to exceed E$150. There is no haggling, in the sense that the purchaser offers a counter-price which is closer to the study's real value, for injury to the owner's pride would be *[192] certain to end negotiations. Rather, the prospective purchaser asks for special consideration on the grounds that the seller is his wadajey ("friend", but not peer), and that his assistance is needed. If the abinet owner is amenable to the appeal, a price is set at one-half, one-quarter, or even less of the study's assessed value. Even so, the cost of abinet is sufficiently great to deplete the purchaser's reserves in short order should he persist with such purchases.

*756 *787 *793 437 Before a man can begin to exchange abinet for abinet, he must obtain a sufficient variety of valuable studies in order to interest other debteras in an exchange. Once acquired, an abinet repertoire proves itself a superior medium of exchange for acquiring more abinet. Unlike friendship, abinet are entirely liquid; unlike labor purchase, abinet exchange is neither demeaning nor time-consuming; unlike money pruchase, it involves neither principal in difficult price setting, and far from being exhausted, the abinet capital tends to grow the more a debtera "spends" of it.

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A debtera is occupied by three concerns when exchanging abinet subjects: First, he must be certain that alter's study does not substantively duplicate, in whole or large part, abinet he already owns. However, a debtera does not exclude the acquisition of a study which duplicates the intention of one he already owns.

Second, he must learn whether alter's study is empirically effective or untested. A study's effectiveness is inferred from the owner's public reputation for achieving the designated ends; often, it is this reputation which first attracts the interest of a potential purchaser. Where this information is unavailable, the principals may agree to a test of the abinet; here, conditions relevant to the study's purported effects are simulated, often with the use of domestic animals in lieu of humans. Generally, such tests cannot be contrived for prophylactic or therapeutic works, however. When only the seller's assurance is available, the fear of punitive kifat works by the recipient provides an inducement for objectively evaluating the abinet's effectiveness. Finally, some studies are offered with the admission that they are untested. Proven works are considered far more valuable than untested ones, and each category tends to be exchanged within its separate sphere.

Third, the debtera's final concern is that the value of the studies he receives approximates the value of

12:Young E-4,5 (1966) 1971 MP5 Amhara MP5
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those he gives. The relative value of an abinet study is weighed against criteria recognized by both principals, although verbalized by neither during their negotiations. These criteria refer to the study's goals, its constituent elements, and its efficacy. 1) Criteria regarding goals enable ego to assess the commercial [192] value of alter's study, if it is effective. Studies whose goals involve issues of life and death, or serious physical impairment, and studies with offensive intent (kifat), are valued above those characterized by inessential or benign goals. A study whose goals are not ordinarily addressed by abinet or secular works is valued over those made redundant by widely disseminated works. A study which deals with a common interest of the debtera's public is valued greater than one which addresses an unusual concern. 2) Regarding constituent elements, an abinet study is valued if its digam contains magical names (asmat), but it is derogated if the digam simply replicates materials available in ecclesiastical texts. A study which calls for ingredients which are reasonably accessible is valued more than one calling for rare items. 3) Finally, a study which works by true magic, asmat, is valued over one which relies on mithat, a trick or illusion simulating the effects of asmat.

Comparison with Secular Medical Capital. Rarely does a layman acquire any disease name specialty beyond

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869 those few he inherits. Additional acquisitions are discouraged for several reasons. First, the exchange of medical knowledge with other healers is difficult to arrange. A layman is unlikely to find another secular healer whose medical specialty he desires and who desires
[437] one of the few disease name specialties he owns. Thus, it is generally cattle or money which must be exchanged for medical knowledge. Such purchases are relatively expensive, since the gain is only a minor increment in prestige and the tenuous possibility of earning modest material rewards after an extended period of professional obscurity. Further, the layman has available to him alternative forms of investment (mainly land, labor, and livestock), whose utilization is more consistent with the ethos of the Amhara peasant, and more remunerative (in prestige and material rewards) than the practice of new therapies.

The secular healer (particularly the medhaniyt awakiy) is reluctant to part with professional knowledge, even when a reasonable price is offered. Unlike the abinet capital of debteras, medical capital dissipates
*756 as it is "spent". When debteras exchange subjects,
*793 neither considers the other a rival in the specialties
869 which they exchange. Eventually, their paths are bound to part, as one or the other continues his travels over the Coptic highlands. Moreover, a debtera is not known